TAP weekly

SimCity Comes to the Palm

By Denny Atkin

While it's true that power corrupts, *absolute* power is a lot of fun. And what could be more fun than having total control over an entire city, its construction and destruction tied to your every whim?

A decade ago, game designer Will Wright tried to convince publishers that folks would enjoy this kind of "simulated city," but they just laughed. So he formed his own company, Maxis, published the game himself, and had a few laughs of his own. SimCity became a worldwide sensation, earned legions of fans, and spawned dozens of sequels and clones.

What's the appeal? While managing a city may sound a lot like work, SimCity is about as fun as computer gaming gets. It's a true classic, one that can keep you sitting at your PC until 4 a.m.

Or standing at your Palm/Pilot. French software house Atelier (www.ateliersoftware.com) has just introduced SimCity for the Palm OS, a full-blown, Maxis-approved port of the original game. And we mean *full*-blown. This is no stripped-down clone; everything you remember from SimCity Classic is here, from constructing residential, commercial and industrial areas to reading reports on how you're doing as mayor to unleashing giant lizards when you've grown tired of a town. (Even the old cheats still work: just write the word "fund" in the Graffiti area and you'll find yourself with an extra $10,000.)
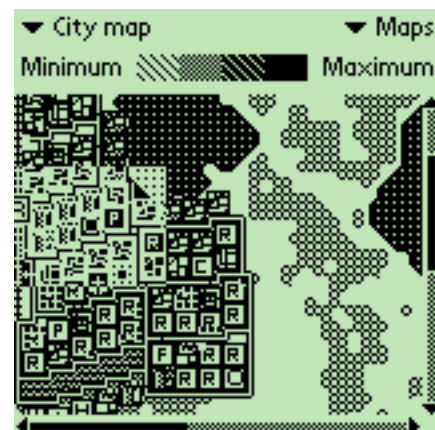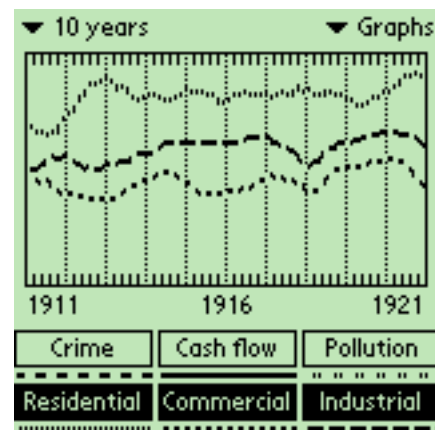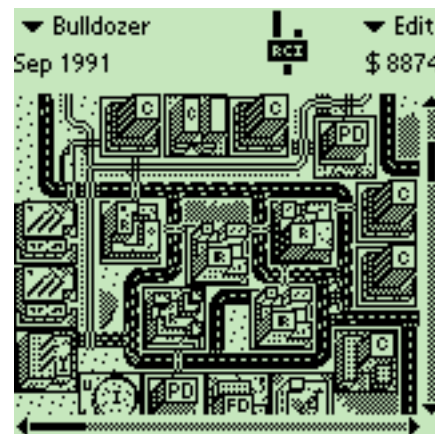
The game looks and feels almost identical to the original, except that the icon panels have been replaced with pop-up menus (due to the Palm/Pilot's more limited screen estate). Play is perhaps a tad slower, but with the increased scrolling required on the small screen, this is actually a relief.

You'll need a fair chunk of RAM to play the game—250K—but it's worth clearing out some old, unneeded software to make room for SimCity. Based on our early experience, it looks to be a top-notch adaptation of one of the true classics of computer gaming.

SimCity isn't the only classic computer game headed for the Palm. Next up: **Karateka**, the beloved karate-fighting game that originated on the Apple II. An early—but working—demo, complete with 4-level grayscale graphics, is available for download from the developer's Web site. *Beiks, Ltd., www.beiks.com*

Visor Updates: WizCom Technologies, makers of electronic pens that scan and translate text, will introduce next year a scanning pen for the Visor. Meanwhile, Symbol Technologies is working on a barcode-scanning Visor module.

Quick Tip Revisited: We need to clarify last week's tip for inverting the backlighting: the "shortcut.8" command appears to be incompatible with Palm OS 3.3. Fortunately, there are a number of Hacks available that accomplish the same goal. Visit your favorite software sitet and look for Hacks relating to backlighting.

Lights Out
Free, Andy Scheffler, www.palmgear.com

If you're going to play games during those dreary board meetings, you might as well play one that keeps your gray matter stimulated. Lights Out is guaranteed to energize your noggin as you attempt to solve a succession of seemingly innocuous puzzles.

Based on a handheld game of the same name, Lights Out consists of a simple five-by-five grid of lights. Tap on a light and it reverses itself—off if it was on, on if it was off. In addition, the four adjacent lights also turn on or off, depending on their starting position. The object of the game is simple: Turn out all the lights.

It sounds easy, but Lights Out is bound to stump even the sharpest minds. The games start out fairly easy, but each of the 51 puzzles is more complex than the last. On the right side of the screen, Lights Out displays the minimum number of taps necessary to solve the puzzle—in addition to the number of taps you've made. The first level is solvable in six moves—we found this frustrating when our tap count reached the 150 mark. When you're ready to hurl your Palm/Pilot skyward, stop, take a deep breath, and tap on the Solve button. This marks the taps needed to complete the puzzle. Seeing how the solutions evolve does help you figure out strategies for the game. But, as we all know, it's no fun to win by cheating.

You can't beat Lights Out's free price, so load it up and give it a go. You might have a love/hate relationship with the game if you find the puzzles a bit challenging. But you'll find yourself going back to the game again and again, determined to turn out all the lights. —*Kyla K. Carlson*

New Software This Week

AnyExpense 1.0 • The expense-management program *du jour* offers tracking for multiple projects; different forms for entering client, project and expense data; and a variety of sorting options for producing expense sheets. *Palm-Top.com, www.palm-top.com*

Image Viewer III version 3.3 • Newly updated to support Palm OS 3.3, Image Viewer III lets you view graphics files in 16-level grayscale on the Palm IIIe/IIIx, Palm V series and other newer models, and black and white images on older models. *HexCode Software, http://palm.dahm.com*

New York Times Handheld Edition • Finally, the New York Times comes to the Palm VII via this Query App. *Palm Computing, www.palm.net*